

Avoiding Ticks

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During the hot summer months, ticks can become real pests. These parasites feed on human and animal blood and can be found in Missouri all year, although they are most commonly seen after the last frost.

Through their body fluids – like saliva and blood – ticks can give humans diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, ehrlichiosis, tularemia, Lyme disease and lyme-like illness.

The best way to protect yourself against these illnesses is to avoid tick bites.

- ✓ Eliminate tick habitat in your yard by cleaning up brush, litter and woodpiles. Prune branches to let sunlight in and consider treating your yard with a pesticide.
- ✓ Avoid areas where ticks are likely to be found, such as moist, cool places under ground cover, brush or leaves.
- ✓ If you must be in these areas, wear shoes and socks and long pants. Tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- ✓ Wear light-colored clothing so ticks are easier to spot.
- ✓ Apply an insect repellent with no more than 30% DEET to adults and to children older than two months old. Avoid putting it near children's eyes and mouth or on their hands. **Do not use insect repellent on children less than two months old.** DEET will offer a few hours of protection. Be sure to wash it off your skin when you return indoors.
- ✓ For longer protection, consider applying a repellent containing permethrin to boots and clothing. Protection will last several days.

Check yourself frequently for ticks. They are most likely to transmit diseases after they have been feeding for two or more days. Look in warm places, such as your underarms, sock-line, behind your ears, under tight-fitting clothing and in your hair.

A tick's bite is usually painless, so you may not even know they are there. But once they bite, they may stay attached to the skin until they become engorged with blood and let go. This can take up to ten days.

If you spot a tick, remove it promptly.

- ✓ Use tweezers to grasp the tick as close to your skin as possible.
- ✓ With steady pressure pull the tick out of the skin. Do not twist or jerk, which may cause the tick's mouth to break off in your skin. Do not use creams, liquids or heat to get the tick to release.
- ✓ After you remove the tick, wash the bite site and your hands with soap and water.
- ✓ Do not crush the tick. This puts you at increased risk of coming into contact with its body fluid. Label a freezer bag with the date of the bite, seal the tick inside and store it in your freezer for 2-3 weeks in case you develop medical complications.

Although most tick bites will heal on their own, watch for a sudden onset of fever, muscle pain or headache followed by a rash. If any of these symptoms develop, contact your health care provider.

For more information on preventing tick bites and tick-borne illness, contact the Springfield-Greene County Health Department at (417) 864-1658.